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ABSTRACT

The recommendations presented in this paper for successfully implementing a two-year college student recruitment campaign focus mainly on the high school senior and presuppose the existence of a recruiting staff. Initially, it is emphasized that an effective campaign is based on a series of positive items. Elements of a successful recruitment program include: (1) adoption of corporate marketing methods, such as market research, advertising, emphasis on selling, use of a professional sales staff, and altering the product according to marketing demands; (2) emphasis on a people orientation; (3) total college effort in keeping with institutional goals and philosophy; (4) selling the parent; (5) an impressive placement record demonstrating what programs can offer; (6) linking of recruitment and financial aid activities; (7) selling those aspects of a college which are most distinctive in a manner which lets the prospective student know how he/she can benefit from them; (8) openness to markets such as the adult, the industrial worker, the four-year college dropout, and the liberal arts graduate with no marketable skills; (9) accurate, honest, and attractive promotional literature; and (10) awareness of competitors after the same students. (MB)

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STUDENT RECRUITMENT FOR THE PUBLIC, TWO-YEAR COLLEGE

A MANDATORY ASPECT OF INSTITUTIONAL VIABILITY

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(To a subgroup of the Missouri Association of Community & Junior Colleges)

Good morning ladies and gentlemen! This morning I will share with you some insights which I have gained over the past dozen years as an administrator in three different private institutions, each of which has grappled seriously with the problem of student enrollment. In the past twelve years, I have been to such cities as Minneapolis, Fort Lauderdale, Nashville, Chicago, Rochester, Williamsburg, Myrtle Beach, New Orleans, and Boston. I attended these workshops with the "professionals" to study management by objectives for the admissions office, audio visuals for recruitment, how to design and write materials for promotion. I have had my sales presentation taped and analyzed by these same professionals, I spent ten days with high school counselors on how to relate to high school students and high school professional personnel in guiding the high school senior toward college. I have studied how to survey market areas, how to motivate faculty and other volunteers to help in recruitment, how to prospect and process for results, and how to effectively use financial aid for recruitment. Ladies and gentlemen, you are just beginning the long process which I started those dozen years ago. I hope that in the next hour and a half I will be able to share with you some of the insights from my own experience and pilgrimage which may save you some of the agony and errors which I have made in my gropings to become a significant marketer for higher education. I have boosted, wept, and made excuses; I have blamed and alibied; because of it all, however, I feel I am a much better man and have learned a lot about people, education and myself.

Probably the most agonizing element of these years in student recruitment has been those times when I have seen my colleagues in administrative and faculty positions terminated for lack of enrollment. We generally refer to FTE as meaning Full Time Equivalent students; I am here to suggest to you that FTE in the future may well mean Full Time Employment for those of us in the college ranks. I don't intend to be a prophet of doom, but I definitely want to project my feeling of urgency in establishing a distinct and aggressive plan for student recruitment. You will notice I have used the word "recruitment" more than "admissions." Sometimes I will use them interchangeably; however, I perfer the term recruitment because of its agressive tone rather than "admissions" which has more of a gatekeeper overtone. I am here to suggest that we are no longer gatekeepers at the halls of the academe; rather, we are the salesmen whose job it is to state our position clearly and firmly in order to recruit for our institutions. When contemplating an approach to the vast field of student recruitment, I feel like the proverbial mosquito in a nudist camp....I know what I want to do, I just don't know where to start! We have to "start" somewhere so let's begin with several presuppositions for an agressive admissions program in the community college.

1. The majority of my address will be directed toward the recruitment of the high school senior. Some mention will be made of other markets, but these will be secondary or tertiary in nature.

2. There is no room for apology for selling our product or programs. If what we have meets needs and if what we are doing, we do well; if we have good people and facilities, and if the student wants or needs what we have to offer, then why should we apologize for telling them about it with enthusiasm!

3. Just because the community college is extremely reasonably priced, do not make that the major reason for selling your program over that of more expensive programs. Sell your program for what it can do for a student, not how inexpensive it is. The concept of price should be one of the last items mentioned, sort of the icing on the cake of your sell.

4. An effective sell is based on a series of positive items often rather small and seemingly insignificant and seldom because of one large item. Keep this in mind as you design your promotional literature as well as your sales presentation for high school talks.

5. Keep in mind that perception is reality to the student (actually for all of us). It is very helpful to determine how people perceive your institution and its reputation. This will enable you to begin where your prospects are in making your presentation to them.

6. Keep in mind the high school counselors have various loyalties (many times to the four-year colleges from which they graduated or the institution from which they earned their masters or doctorate). They may not be your best friend, but they can be among your worst enemies! Keep the high school counselors well informed of what you are doing and why you are doing it. This is not only professional but also pragmatic.
7. Some of my comments will presuppose the existence of a recruiting staff. If you don't have one, attempt to adapt these concepts to your operation if at all possible. By the way, if you are trying to handle an effective recruitment program for the community college by the use of a faculty admissions committee alone, you have your work cut out for you!

With these presuppositions in mind, let's move ahead to consider some eighteen different elements of an effective recruitment program. There is no particular significance in the sequencing of these items.

1. The community college should begin to adopt corporate marketing methods, being careful to alter these methods as appropriate for educational purposes. I am referring to such things as market research, advertising, emphasis on sell, employing professional sales staff, and altering the product according to market demands, to mention a few.

2. Every college program we have, including the recruiting emphasis must be people oriented. We must view the student as our customer and not as an interruption in an already too busy schedule.
3. The recruitment emphasis must be in line with the institution's philosophy and objectives. We must know where the institution is going and then determine how we fit into it. Recruitment must not be the tail that wags the dog.
4. Recruitment is a total college effort not the role of admissions or recruitment staff only. Everyone from the president to the custodian must view recruitment as a major emphasis if the institution is to survive, grow and prosper.
5. An effective recruitment effort must be based on thorough and appropriate market research. This research must include not only those that attend our colleges, but also those that chose not to attend. What is the composition of our market area? The Bureau of Statistics and local governmental agencies should be able to assist you in this market research.
6. A concerted effort must be made in recruitment to sell the parent on the relevancy of our programs. While the student has a good deal to say about his college selection, many of the students from middle class homes especially will value very highly their parents' feelings and opinions about programs and career choices. Whether the student knows or likes it, the parents do care about their youngsters' future! This means that some of our literature and media advertising must be addressed to the parents, an often overlooked element in student recruitment.

7. The recruiter must have a program worth selling. No amount of fancy footwork and window dressing will substitute for an adequate and relevent program supported by the necessary student personnel services. The director of marketing or director of admissions and recruiters must constantly feed back to the administration what they believe are valid needs in the market area in order to make the institutions' programs relevant and marketable.
8. An impressive placement record will be exceedingly helpful in your recruitment emphasis. We are currently in a time of the "so what!;" the so what of .. college education today is, "What will it mean to me when I finish?" Be sure your students are placeable and placed and then use this successful placement record on the front end, the recruitment emphasis.
9. The administration of financial aid for our institutions must either be under the direction of the recruitment department or at least be easily accessable to the same. Since many students receive financial assistance, it is imperative that the recruitment staff have significant input as to the allocation of these funds.
10. The recruitment and/or admissions staff and/or admissions committee must locate and isolate those factors which are distinctive for their college. The old saying "everybodies' business is nobodies' business" is true in the recruitment effort. We don't sell "all things to all people." We sell our distinctive to persons who are seeking these kinds of distinctives. After isolating these distinctives, we must package them attractively and honestly and then sell them unapologetically!

11. The recruitment staff must keep in mind at all times that the prospective college student has foremost in mind the question, "What's in it for me?" We must not be lulled into mediocre efforts by listening to our own fine rhetoric and viewing our fancy promotional literature. The student is interested only in what our institution can do to prepare him or her for a more meaningful and productive life.

12. We must be open to unique markets. These markets may include the adult, the industrial worker, the four-year college drop out or fail outs, four-year college liberal arts graduates who cannot find jobs, the evening students (such as housewives), the international student, the handicapped student, the veteran and students under special governmental programs such as Ceta and Vocational Rehabilitation.

13. We must encourage academic deans and faculties to review course offerings to insure marketable programs. To do this, a survey of our communities should be made to locate areas of occupational deficiencies. We can then begin to prepare people to fill these deficiencies as well as set up programs to train those adults who now have those jobs and prepare them to better handle the responsibilites they already have. We can also set up programs that will help the adults increase their upward mobility with the companies for which they currently work.

14. We must set up policies and procedures whereby we do not lose the students who indicate interest in our institutions. My experience indicates that it works well to divide the admissions and/or recruitment office into prospecting and processing divisions. Every effort must be made to "prospect" markets to come up with names, addresses, telephone numbers, and other relevent information about our prospects. Once a student indicates an interest, however, we must decide and develop the most appropriate means for nurturing that interest into an application. Once the application is received we must view that person (not as an enrollment) as our best prospect. Every effort must be made to reduce fallout between the time of application and the time for enrollment. A part of this effort should include a series of holding letters or other communications to keep the students' interest and keep them informed about our institutions.

15. Our literature must accurately, honestly, and attractively portray what our institution has to offer to our prospects. It must emphasize those areas that we have determined to be our distinctives. We must delineate our programs, locality, costs, and facilities from our competition.

16. We must isolate who are our competitors. It is only as we recognize who is after the same student we are after that we can effectively meet the challenge of our competition. We must isolate what the distinctives of the competition are.

17. We must be creative in our recruitment emphasis. We should use faculty, appropriate and attractive mailings, alumni, students, telephone, and various mass media. We must also be creative in how we use these and all other elements in our recruitment emphasis.

18. We must initiate an institution-wide, aggressive, unapologetic approach at student retention. Retention statistics can be a powerful force in recruitment. If you can inform the prospective students and their parents and to some degree the high school counselors that students who enter your institution stand a far greater chance of graduating than students who are entering other institutions, you then have developed probably one of your most effective sales tools.

Needless to say, there is much more to student recruitment than what I have been able to enumerate here. I'll be more than glad to work with anyone individually after this session on any one of the particulars of recruitment.....such things as how to get referrals, how to make appointments, effective ways of setting up campus tours, handling in-office interviews, developing effective mass mailing pieces, use of mag-card typewriters, effective class talks, designing an effective reply card, and other important aspects of an effective recruitment program. Thank you for your attention and for the opportunity to share these items with you!

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